



One Hundred Fourteenth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20515

June 11, 2015

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

A major consequence of the global surge in Islamist extremism has been the displacement of millions of people in war zones across the Middle East and North Africa. Your Administration has announced plans to resettle some of these refugees here in the United States. In a Committee on Homeland Security hearing held in February, the Director of the National Counterterrorism Center acknowledged that refugees from the conflict in Syria and Iraq being admitted to the United States were “a population of concern,” given the possibility that members of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or al Qaeda networks such as al Nusra Front might attempt to exploit refugee programs to gain entry into the United States.

It is my understanding that the Department of State intends to admit 2,000 Syrian refugees this fiscal year and many more in 2016 and beyond, in addition to more than 500 admitted since 2011. While we have a proud history of welcoming refugees, the Syrian conflict is a unique case requiring heightened vigilance and scrutiny. It represents the single largest convergence of Islamist terrorists in history, including those associated with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), al Qaeda, and Hezbollah.

We are increasingly concerned by the decision to accelerate the resettlement of thousands of Syrian refugees here in the United States despite the serious national security implications of doing so. There is a real risk that individuals associated with terrorist groups will attempt to exploit the refugee resettlement program in order to gain entry into our country. Terrorist networks are constantly probing our defenses and would not hesitate to manipulate a program meant to save those fleeing violence for the purpose of infiltrating operatives onto American soil. Indeed, ISIS’s predecessor al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) has already successfully exploited U.S. government refugee resettlement programs in 2009 when two terrorists responsible for killing four Pennsylvania National Guard soldiers in Iraq in 2005 were granted entry and resettled in Bowling Green, Kentucky.

Our screening processes currently suffer from vulnerabilities given the dynamic terror threat environment in Syria, the lack of intelligence sources on the ground, and the paucity of biometric and biographic information needed to conduct high-confidence assessments. As FBI's Assistant Director for Counterterrorism testified before the House Homeland Security Committee in February, due to the lack of a U.S. footprint on the ground in Syria "the databases won't have the information we need" for effective vetting. Simply put, we cannot screen against derogatory information we do not have.

My Committee and I have been sounding the alarm for months. I am deeply disappointed that your Administration failed to fully respond in a timely manner to our concrete requests on this important national security issue, including our February 19, 2015 letter from the Committee.

The United States has a national security interest in destroying the terrorist networks currently operating in Syria and Iraq, and in preventing groups such as al Qaeda and ISIS from carrying out attacks against the United States and our allies. While the refugee resettlement program represents the very best of the United States' generous and altruistic nature and is a necessary and valuable effort to provide assistance to some families devastated by conflict, we cannot allow terrorists who pose a direct threat to the U.S. Homeland to exploit these programs to carry out attacks on our soil.

Our outstanding questions have taken on greater urgency after ISIS demonstrated its ability to infiltrate and seize refugee camps in Syria earlier last month. I respectfully request that your Administration provide Members on the Committee of Homeland Security with a classified interagency briefing on these issues and a set of written responses from the Department of State and the FBI to the initial questions asked in February no later than July 7, 2015.

I am hopeful that your Administration will cooperate with my Committee in earnest so that we can help ensure the safety of the American people.

Sincerely,



MICHAEL T. McCAUL
Chairman

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